

Message Text

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INFO PAN CANAL

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 3397

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJ: CORRUPTION CRACKDOWN UNDER WAY IN GN

REF: PANAMA 3231

SUMMARY: IN WAKE OF LT. COL. (RETIRED) LUIS SEGURO'S ARREST, TORRIJOS REPORTEDLY HAS LAUNCHED INVESTIGATION OF LOWER AND MIDDLE GRADE GN OFFICERS SUSPECTED OF CORRUPTION. EXCEPT FOR LT. COL. PEDRO AYALA, NONE OF THE SENIOR GN OFFICERS ARE INCLUDED BUT, REPORTEDLY THE INVESTIGATION IS INTENDED AS A WARNING TO THEM AS WELL. WE HAVE NOTICED UPSURGE OF RUMORS CONCERNING CORRUPTION RECENTLY. WHETHER THESE HAVE BEEN STIMULATED BY TORRIJOS' OPPONENTS OR BY A REAL INCREASE IN SUCH ACTIVITIES, IS NOT CLEAR. NEVERTHELESS, BECAUSE OF THEM TORRIJOS IS UNDER PRESSURE TO CRACK DOWN ON CORRUPTION AND APPEARS TO HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE ACTION. END SUMMARY.

1. ACCORDING TO A RELIABLE EMBASSY SOURCE, GENERAL TORRIJOS HAS ORDERED THAT 14 MIDDLE AND 18 JUNIOR GRADE NATIONAL GUARD OFFICERS BE INVESTIGATED ON SUSPICION OF CORRUPTION. SOME OF THESE MEN WILL BE CASHIERED AND OTHERS WILL BE REPRI-MANDED. THIS INVESTIGATION COMES IN THE WAKE OF THE ARREST (REFTEL) OF LT. COL. (RETIRED) LUIS SEGURA,
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DIRECTOR OF INTEL, ON CHARGES OF TAKING A KICKBACK FROM

PROMINENT REALTOR LENIN SUCRE--WHO IS A SECOND COUSIN OF THE VICE PRESIDENT.

2. REPORTEDLY, LT. COL. PEDRO AYALA, COMMANDER OF THE PANAMA POLICIA, IS ALSO UNDER INVESTIGATION, AND WAS QUESTIONED AT GN HEADQUARTERS ON JUNE 1 AND 2. THE SOURCE WAS UNAWARE OF THE OUTCOME OF THE INVESTIGATION CONCERNING AYALA, BUT DOUBTED THAT ANY PUBLIC REVELATION WOULD BE MADE CONCERNING AYALA'S ALLEGED MISDEEDS. WHILE TORRIJOS HAS NOT ORDERED INVESTIGATIONS OF OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GN'S SENIOR HIERARCHY AT THIS TIME, SOURCE REPORTED THAT THE CRACKDOWN ON LOWER ECHELONS IS MEANT BY TORRIJOS AS A WARNING TO FRIGHTEN "THE COLONELS."

3. COMMENT: RUMORS THAT VARIOUS HIGH LEVEL GN OFFICERS HAVE BECOME INVOLVED IN BUSINESS INTERPRISES OR CORRUPTION HAVE PERIODICALLY CIRCULATED IN PANAMA; HOWEVER, WE HAVE NOTED AN UPSURGE OF SUCH RUMORS DURING THE PAST TWO MONTHS. EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE TOLD US TORRIJOS HAS BEEN UNDER PRESSURE FROM SOME ADVISERS TO CRACK DOWN ON CORRUPTION IN GN. IN DOING SO, HOWEVER, HE FACES SOMEWHAT OF A DILEMMA. HE MUST TRY TO PROTECT HIS GOVERNMENT FROM SUCH ACCUSATIONS AS HIS OPPONENTS REPORTEDLY ARE SEEKING TO EXPLOIT ISSUES OF CORRUPTION, "LEFTIST DRIFT" OF GOP, AND "SOFTNESS" ON TREATY ISSUES. ON THE OTHER HAND, HARSH ACTION AGAINST KEY SENIOR GN OFFICERS COULD CAUSE PROBLEMS FOR HIM WITHIN THE GN AT TIME WHEN BROAD UNITY AND SUPPORT ARE ESSENTIAL TO WARD OFF THE ATTACKS THAT WILL INEVITABLY BE LEVIED AGAINST HIM IF A TREATY IS SIGNED. IT APPEARS THAT TORRIJOS IS SERIOUS ABOUT REDUCING HIS VULNERABILITY TO CRITICISM RELATED TO CORRUPTION IN THE GN AND ELSEWHERE AND THAT HE IS STARTING AT THE LOWER AND MIDDLE LEVELS, HOPING ALSO TO HAVE AN INDIRECT IMPACT ON HIGHER LEVELS WITHOUT THE NECESSITY OF PUBLIC DISCLOSURES OR ENDEANGERING GN UNITY.

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